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Retracing Curatorial Developments in the National Park Service

Ralph H. Lewis

The establishing legislation for the National Park Service prescribes the preservation of natural and historic objects in the parks and their nondestructive use for the enjoyment of present and future generations. Inherent in this charge is the full range of curatorial functions. It makes curators of the Director of the National Park Service and every park superintendent. In 1905, Custodian Frank "Boss" Pinkley, living in his lonely tent at Casa Grande, saw the necessity of collecting, preserving and displaying the vulnerable, movable resources in his care. Also in 1905, the acting superintendent of Yosemite, referred to his park as a great museum of nature.[1] A national park does constitute a special kind of museum. It protects and interprets the very resources which justify its existence. Without this commitment, the park would be the poorer, visually and emotionally.

Even as a young agency, the Park Service found its boundries expanding beyond its capabilities to manage them. Top administrators delegated a portion of their curatorial duties to the park naturalists who assumed authority over transportable and often fragile objects of scientific or historic importance. In the 1920's, the first

Ned J. Burns, Chief of the Museum Branch, modeling a minature figure for a diarama. Burns headed the NPS museum program from 1936 to 1953. Photo courtesy of the NPS History Collection, HFC.

generation of naturalists discovered a need for special skills and knowledge to care for the collections. Carl P. Russell, field naturalist and museum expert, initiated in-service training at the First Park Naturalists' Training Conference in 1929. Recognizing his own need for more instruction, he spent the next few years under the careful tutelage of Dr. Hermon Carey Bumpus, an eminent museologist, to whom the Service is deeply indebted. As a result, curatorial methods courses, printed guides to curatorial practice, and individual training opportunities evolved.

Curatorial activities took an unexpected twist when Director Stephen Mather, in conjunction with NPS park supervisors, urged naturalists to give priority to collecting cultural artifacts. Park geological or biological resources could be gathered any time, they reasoned, but the cultural artifacts were unique and disappearing, and visitors found them vastly interesting.[2] Unfortunately, this emphasis led to the neglect of natural history collection. It also assumed the naturalists had more basis for making discriminating judg-

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Measurable Progress in the Care of Collections

Ann Hitchcock

Noteworthy advances are occurring in the care of Park Service collections. The articles in this volume, devoted to curatorial and conservation programs, testify that Servicewide, curators, conservators, and museum aides and technicians are actively addressing the needs of park collections. In our call for papers for a curatorial issue of the CRM BULLETIN, the response was so great that its editors decided to devote two volumes rather than one to curatorial and conservation concerns.

In 1980, with the establishment of the position of Chief Curator, the Park Service made a commitment to place greater emphasis on curatorial programs Servicewide. Since then, there has been a measurable increase in curatorial activity. The articles in this issue and the next illustrate recent progress in improving the quality of collections management and

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North Atlantic Region Museum Technician Training Curriculum

Edward L. Kallop, Jr.

With the assistance of New England and New York City conservators, a training curriculum has been conducted over the past two years by the North Atlantic Region's Museum Specialist (Metals Conservator), Edward McManus. The curriculum addresses object preservation needs for park museum technicians, curators, and trainees outside the Service.

Phase I of the training began in 1981 with identical courses presented first in Boston, then in New York. Eighteen trainees participated from eleven sites in the region. Phase II began the following year with eight trainees, two from museums outside the Service. The coursework offered in-depth exposure to object conservation, both in theory and practice as understood by the profession.

The program is deliberately termed a curriculum, since each course builds on preceding ones. With Phase I and Phase II established as part of the region's annual training effort, Phase III is being considered. With a third phase, the curriculum will be regarded probably as complete.

Under Phase I, trainees met one full day each week for a total of ten weeks. Coursework consisted of required reading assignments, laboratory exercises, occasional tests, technical films and slide lectures, visits to conservation laboratories specializing in particular materials, and class presentations of individual research papers. Trainees suggested their own research subjects, the only criteria being that they have relevance to course content and that techniques learned and equipment used in laboratory exercises be incorporated in the product presented. Presentation of each paper was accompanied by participant discussion, out of which came recommendations for specific changes later included in the final papers. Copies of completed research papers were offered to interested Service people. So far, requests have gone unmet, due to the technical problem of getting all the papers copied, a condition which hopefully will be resolved during the coming year.

In all cases, trainees presented papers directly related to the sites they represented. Diane Jonassen, at Sagamore Hill, examined the history of indoor climate control at Theodore Roosevelt's country home, with solid evidence to conclude that certain alterations are required in existing mechanical systems to provide acceptable conditions for collection preservation. Michele West of Minute Man National Historical Park, and Diane Duszak of Manhattan Sites, both curators, approached questions of preservation needs for artifacts used in exhibits. These are only some examples of the subjects addressed.

To build on the knowledge and experience gained in Phase I, Phase II drew on all facets of object collections preservation, with the additional demand that trainees work together, exercising judgments as a group. Coupled with this aspect of the course was an escalation of preservation experience in specialized materials. This represented the second of two weeks of training and was accomplished under contract to the New England Museum Association.

All Phase II applicants were carefully screened, with prior participation in Phase I or equivalent training an absolute requirement. The first week, Phase II trainees were assigned to make a full assessment of the North Atlantic Historic Preservation Center's growing but haphazardly stored architectural collection. They consulted with the Center's representative to the course, and jointly recommended a series of actions to bring the collection up to an acceptable standard for preservation. The balance of the week was spent carrying out the tasks determined by participants, with participants expected to make judgments at every step. Environmental conditions were fully noted; record photography provided a full documentation of the operation; an inventory system was perfected, and every object tagged with a correct inventory number; and shelves were cleared and cleaned, with all objects being newly stored in accordance with acceptable standards for preservation maintenance. Participants made specific recommendations concerning the collection to be implemented by the Preservation Center.

In their second week, Phase II trainees became more highly specialized in their research. Two elected to spend a week at the Northeast Document Conservation Center with Mary Todd Glaser and Sherelyn Ogden. Likewise, the rest of the interns scattered to various labs in the area.

As a final assignment, each trainee provided a written appraisal of each half of the course, of the correlation between the two, and the degree of success each attached to Phase II as a successor to Phase I in the curriculum.

For the Region, the results are already coming in. There is now a cadre of well-trained museum technicians approaching their jobs with a degree of selfconfidence and a measure of expertise they did not have two years ago. Among them is a new sense of professional community that is a direct outgrowth of shared experiences. Each to a degree is now a preservation specialist and fully capable of providing assistance in his or her area of specialization. The complex "surgical" treatments of conservation are not theirs to perform, but those of preservation maintenance are, and they now can recognize the symptoms and are qualified to prescribe the cure.

For the Park Service, the curriculum has engendered a new awareness among private sector conservators of our efforts on behalf of collections preservation. Not only has it generated excellent public relations, it also has generated their interest in exploring wider uses for the curriculum. Everyone, conservators included, are coming to recognize that good preservation maintenance for object collections is the best prevention against costly and time consuming conservation. Indeed, it is the most cost effective professional act that our park collections management personnel can perform. **CRM**

The author is Regional Curator, North Atlantic Region.

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CRM Training Opportunities

Thomas G. Vaughan

"Where can I get training for the person who takes care of the collections?" This problem is stated frequently each year by supervisors and managers in the Service. If you are one of these, solutions are available, but you have to do some planning and searching. Here are some tips to guide you in your quest.

The place to start, of course, is with the job and the incumbent. A comparison of what the person needs to know with what he or she does know at the appraisal interview will quickly show the areas in which training could be used. A check with the regional curator probably would confirm the identified training needs and perhaps add others to the list.

Once the training needs have been identified and agreed upon in an Individual Development Plan (IDP), the search for sources begins. Curatorial training opportunities are growing, both inside and outside the Service.

The biggest news in NPS curatorial training is the expansion of Curatorial Methods to two weeks. The expanded class is scheduled to be offered at the Mather Training Center for the first time from June 6 to June 17, 1983. It is hoped that the class will be offered again in October. This expansion is a gratifying response to the pleas of "more time" from so many graduates of the one-week course.

Another training resource is a slide-tape program on museum storage methods now in preparation. The program will illustrate the principles of good storage, and discuss equipment and techniques specific to various types of objects. Carl Degen is the contractor.

Of sideline interest to curators, a number of other courses have been showing greater curatorial content recently. Curatorial concerns have been presented in the Cultural Resource Management for Managers course and the Historic Preservation Maintenance for Managers course. Cultural Resources Management generally has received increased attention in Orientation courses and in the Ranger Skills course, as well.

In addition, curatorial training is sometimes available within the regions. The North Atlantic Region's Technician Training Program (see Edward Kallop's article in this issue) is currently the most developed of the regional offerings.

The Natural Science Division, WASO, Everglades National Park, and the Southeast Regional Office will work together to provide a short practical course on the care of Natural History Collections in mid-March, 1983. The Everglades Natural History Collection will be the subject matter of the course, aimed to provide the trainees with both training and practical experience in the registration and care of biological specimens.

Beyond listed Park Service offerings, local museums and historical societies should be canvassed. Often, a relevant seminar or workshop can be provided by these institutions if enough need is expressed. Participation in local efforts of this type has the added benefit of strengthening the park's ties with the local community and state.

Sometimes local, regional, or Servicewide training cannot meet the need, and longer or more specialized courses must be found. A good place to start looking is: Museum Studies Programs in the United States and Abroad (1982). This publication is available from the Curatorial Services Division, WASO. It is the most complete and current guide available. It lists correspondence courses (Alaska State Museum, University of Idaho, AASLH*), degree programs, internships, workshop centers (for example, Campbell Center for Historic Preservation Studies, Mt. Carroll, IL), seminars sponsored by professional associations (AASLH*, AAM†) and other training opportunities. In most cases, you will have to do follow-up writing or calling to get a listing of current offerings, but it provides a good starting point.

A frequently ignored means of training is an on-the-job-training assignment, often the best method for teaching certain curatorial skills. If a park technician has to organize a storage area, or develop and implement a housekeeping program for a furnished historic structure, that person could be prepared for the task by assisting a qualified curator in a nearby park or museum one or two days weekly for a specified period of time. If this seems a good solution to a training problem in your park, ask the regional curator to review the proposed arrangement to make sure the information received fits Service standards.

The preceding tips probably will not solve all of your curatorial training problems in one fiscal year, but they should help you to orchestrate needs, time, resources, and solutions to gradually build a better curatorial program. **CRM**

*AASLH -- American Association for State and Local History.
†AAM -- American Association of Museums.

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COLLECTIONS cont.

preservation at the park level. The curatorial staff at Hot Springs takes great pride in observing the stabilization of relative humidity readings after the installation of a new HVAC (heating-ventilating-air-conditioning) system. At Golden Gate National Recreation Area, the staff has the pleasure, that can be fully appreciated by other collections managers, of quickly retrieving objects using an up-to-date catalog record system and recently reorganized storage. At Jefferson National Expansion Memorial, the curatorial staff has gained confidence in its decisions regarding conservation treatment by systematically conducting a condition survey and reviewing the significance of the objects in the collection. Few can imagine the joy and excitement of the Harpers Ferry furniture conservator on discovering historic signatures while working on a table from Gettysburg. A regional curator shares the details of a highly successful training program for curators.

Servicewide progress is measurable also in more abstract terms, such as dollars spent and reports produced. Over the last three years, there has been a marked increase in funding for collections. Amounts devoted to collections from the Cultural Resource Preservation Fund, including the Park Restoration and Improvement Program (PRIP), has grown from zero in FY 80 to nearly one million in FY 84. Likewise, regional cyclic maintenance programs now commonly include collections projects, whereas this support was rare three years ago. The Basic Operations Preliminary Assessment (March 30, 1982) provided, for the first time, information on base dollars being spent in curatorial programs. The figure given, $6.4 million, covered all related costs, including personnel. Although the sum is substantial, given the magnitude of the resource to be managed (10 million objects), it amounts to only $0.64 per object. If the field is placing increased emphasis on the management of objects, the figure should rise in future Basic Operations reports. In terms of personnel, the total number

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of parks with curatorial staff has remained at approximately 40 for the last three years, indicating that new tasks are most likely being handled by contract and by assignment to non-curatorial staff.

The existence of planning documents is another way of measuring progress and the sensitivity of park staff to collections. The Washington Office has on file 122 Scope of Collection Statements. If this list is complete, approximately two-thirds of the parks in the system lack this most basic planning document for park collections. In FY 83, the Curatorial Services Division will be updating the list and encouraging parks to complete these documents. Another planning document on the increase is the Collection Preservation Guide (CPG). Over the past three years, an average of five guides was produced annually. By contrast, the anticipated production for FY 83 is 19, which will bring the total to 60.

Another area of considerable concern is accountability, especially in regard to cataloging objects. Since 1980, new records have been entered in the National Catalog at a fairly steady rate of approximately 27,000 per year. Yet, there remains a backlog of over nine million uncataloged objects. We anticipate the rate of cataloging will rise dramatically, beginning in FY 84, with the introduction of new streamlined cataloging procedures that are being devised by the National Catalog Steering Committee (see CRM Bulletin, Vol. 5, Nos. 1-3).

In summary, measurable increases in Servicewide endeavors pertaining to collections management and preservation have taken place over the past three years. And while much work remains to be done, especially in cataloging and storage improvement, the progress in the early 1980's bodes well for future accomplishments. **CRM**

The author is the Chief Curator of the National Park Service.

Priping in St. Louis

Steven Harrison

The Park Rehabilitation and Improvement Project (PRIP) has improved significantly curation of the museum collection at Jefferson National Expansion Memorial National Historic Site. It made funds available for FY 82 which allowed the park to undertake several projects otherwise impossible to implement with normal operating funds.

The project was a cooperative one between Harpers Ferry Center and the curatorial staff in St. Louis. Diana Pardue, staff curator with the Museum Services Division (HFC), now with the Curatorial Services Division, WASO, had primary responsibility for the project. She was familiar with the park's museum, having prepared its Collection Preservation Guide in 1980. The Guide provided an important basis for planning the PRIP project. It allowed the park staff to know what supplies and services were needed so that park funds could be budgeted to alleviate those identified problems.

The $35,000 fund was managed by the Museum Services Division, Harpers Ferry Center, with requisitions coming from the park or from the Harpers Ferry curatorial staff through the park. Purchase orders were then issued by the procurement office at Harpers Ferry Center. The only exception to this was some $3,500 transferred to the Midwest Region for direct control by the park.

A breakdown of the original budget follows: museum storage (supplies and equipment), $7,000; conservation (surveys of paintings, ethnographic objects, paper, wood and bronze sculpture), $9,000; museum accountability (photographing objects, library and archival survey, accession records

Curator Steve Harrison with new rolled textile storage.

survey, library cataloging), $1,400; packing and shipping, and returning loans, $2,500; environmental protection (primarily humidity and light), $8,600; museum security (for museum storage, archives, and library), $3,000. Although these figures were tentative and some of the categories blurred at times, the final expenditures were close to that planned.

A wide spectrum of work was done with rather even coverage of the entire collection. For example, improvements in environmental protection and security benefited most of the collection. When photographing museum objects, emphasis was placed on taking photographs of the high-valued accountable objects for park records. There are hundreds of other objects that warrant being photographed, but the park staff was forced to set some priorities and establish some limits on each category.

An important part of the project was conservation. Initially, the staff thought about having conservation work performed. The park staff knew there were objects that needed treatment, but it was not sure that these same objects warranted treatment when looking at the collection as a whole. It became apparent that the park did not have the basic information upon which to base conservation priorities. Because conservation is expensive and a conservator's time is precious, the staff felt a responsibility to make every penny and every minute count. The result was a thoughtful and deliberate process. It was decided to have conservation surveys made of specific segments of the museum collection. These segments corresponded with the specialties of the conservators in the Divison of Conservation Labs, Harpers Ferry Center, who conducted most of the surveys. The exception to use of the HFC conservation staff was a contract to the Center for Archaeometry for surveying bronze sculpture in the collection.

It was also decided to contract the survey of ethnographic objects because of the volume of material in that part of the park's collection. The conservation surveys were the first of a three-step process, and the only step that the park staff felt could be contracted. The second step involved the park curatorial staff surveying the collection to assess the appropriateness and historical value of each object. This separation of surveys allowed maximum objectivity. The third step will combine these surveys into a list of objects in the order in which they need and warrant available conservation funds.

The PRIP project was not an end for the park staff, but a beginning. Its benefits extended beyond the immediate acquisition of new cabinets or additional security devices. It has forced the staff to look closely at its collection and how that collection has been managed. It has raised important questions which otherwise might not have been asked. It has put the park staff in touch with a variety of people, both inside and outside the National Park Service, and that has stimulated fresh approaches to managing the cultual resources in the park's care. **CRM**

The author is the Museum Specialist at Jefferson National Expanison Memorial National Historic Site.

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One Giant Step for Hot Springs

Ellen R. Lasley

In the early spring of 1982, Hot Springs National Park was faced with a curatorial collection of several thousand objects housed in a surplus park building with no heat, air conditioning, or humidity controls. Only about 700 artifacts had been cataloged. Some artifacts were stacked in boxes on the floor. Others were kept in the non-operational bathhouses where they were susceptible to damage, vandalism, and theft. Work with this collection generally consisted of sorting through the mess and grouping boxes into accessions. The park's records were less than satisfactory--the accession book was up to date, but only the briefest information had been entered. Few artifacts were marked with their accession number, and in several cases, the Park Service could show no proof of ownership.

Aware of this situation, the Curatorial Services Division, Washington, designated $18,500 from the Park Restoration and Improvement Program (PRIP) for curatorial assistance at Hot Springs. Gordon Gay, Registrar of the National Catalog (Harpers Ferry Center) reviewed with the park staff those remedial actions it had already identified. It was agreed that: 1) the house storing the collection (formerly the superintendent's residence) was adequate for such purposes and that the park's Collection Preservation Guide (1980) designating the building for curatorial purposes should be implemented; 2) additional storage cabinets and oversized shelving were needed to store the artifacts adequately; and 3) an adequate environmental control system for the curatorial building was mandatory, but its costs would have to be kept below $7,500.

Immediately after this review, steel angle iron and a skid of plywood for shelving were ordered. Three standard specimen cabinets, one large herbarium cabinet, four 5-drawer map cases, and acid free tissue and map folders were also ordered. At the park level, plans were made to purchase an environmental system to control temperature and humidity for the main floor of the house rather than the entire building (two full floors, a basement, and an attic in all). Estimates for a gas heat/electric cool, 5-ton, 140 BTU system were around $5,200, well under the imposed limit. Funds for this purpose, totaling $6,500 were transferred to the park, and installation began in June of 1982.

It had been decided before his arrival that Gordon Gay should spend approximately two to three weeks at Hot Springs to concentrate on the park's storage problems. Before his arrival in mid-May, the specimen cabinets and map cases had been received and placed within the house. Of the three major rooms on the main floor, one was designated for archival items, one for specimen cabinets, and one for steel shelving and large artifacts. It was later decided to place less fragile objects on shelving on the second floor because of space restrictions on the main floor.

Gordon Gay spent the first days of his visit checking the bathhouses and other park structures housing potential collectible items to be included in the museum collection. He found bathhouse artifacts and records, a large number of Park Service memorabilia cached in the maintenance area, and park administrative files that dated from the turn of the century.

During the next two and one-half weeks, a concerted effort was made to clean the storage facility (four truckloads of trash were removed); assemble the steel and plywood shelving and place the objects on them; and assemble other artifacts in one general area.

Crated stain glass from the Maurice Bathhouse, large geological specimens, and ceramic bathtubs were stored in appropriate locations. Within two weeks, all artifacts had been placed in cabinets or on shelving, and several artifacts had been prepared for shipment to the conservation laboratories in Harpers Ferry for preservation treatment.

After Gordon Gay's departure, work continued on the collections, although at a greatly reduced rate because of the demands on park staff time during the summer season. The remaining funds in the park's account were spent on basic curatorial supplies, which included a canister vacuum cleaner, natural specimen jars, herbarium supplies, formaldehyde/alcohol solutions, and cleaning supplies. In addition, it was decided that shelves and artifacts in the storage area should be professionally cleaned to facilitate the best use of time and money. After the proposed job had been discussed with two cleaning contractors, cleaning specifications were drawn up so that all work would be closely supervised and meet NPS curatorial requirements. In addition, all cleaning supplies were to be provided by the park to insure the use of approved cleaning agents.

The current status of the collection is a definite improvement over the situation before PRIP funds were received, and a concerted effort is being made to maintain the momentum. Approximately 200 historic maps and blueprints have been returned to the park after preservation treatment and mylar encapsulation by the Texas Conservation Center. These documents have been organized and protected in the map cases. The remaining untreated documents will be unrolled, flattened, and placed in acid free folders until funding is available to complete preservation. Cataloging of the collection has begun, and the park is actively seeking interns from local universities to assist in this project.

The one remaining area of concern needing attention and one that relates directly to the park's Scope of Collection is the enormous volume of archival material remaining to be organized. The park is awaiting new instructions currently being developed by the National Catalog Steering Committee regarding the organization and cataloging of such large archival collections. (See CRM BULLETIN, No. 5, Vols. 1-3, September 1982, for an article describing the Committee and its mission.) Until such guidance is provided, the park's papers will be organized and made available to researchers in accordance with standard archival procedures.

Currently, a hygrothermograph monitors the curatorial storage area and the Fordyce Bathhouse where some artifacts are displaced during the summer season. The heating, ventilation, and air conditioning system is operational. Work with the curatorial collection is continuing, although other job requirements prevent full attention to such concerns by the staff member assigned curatorial responsibilities for the park. A minimum of 20 percent of this employee's time is now designated for curatorial work, but an effort is being made to increase this percentage. As time permits, a second staff member is being trained in curatorial procedures. Perhaps even more importantly, the entire park staff realizes the value of the collection for which it is responsible, and better appreciates the time, money, and expertise needed to fulfill those responsibilities.

CRM

The author is a Park Ranger (interpretation) at Hot Springs National Park.

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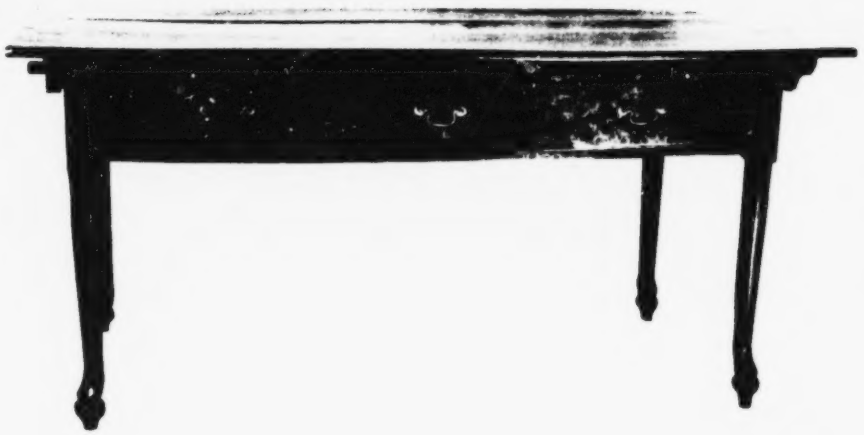
Did you ever wish that a piece of antique furniture could tell you about its past? Sometimes it can, if you listen or look closely enough. General George G. Meade's table has a story to tell that was almost lost.



At the Gettysburg National Military Park Visitor Center, there is on exhibit a cherry wood, three-drawer tavern table, reportedly used by General George G. Meade during the Battle of Gettysburg, July 2-3, 1863. Mrs. Lydia Leister, whose home Meade occupied during the battle, made the claim 14 years later, July 25, 1877, when she sold the table to Edmund J. Cleveland of Elizabeth, New Jersey. She claimed her husband made the table 42 years earlier, dating it to 1835. Later, Edmund J. Cleveland's son, the Rev. E. J. Cleveland, presented the table to the Memorial and Library Association of Westerly, Rhode Island. In May, 1978, the National Park Service bought it and sent it to the Service's Branch of Conservation Laboratories for preservation treatment.

The table required extensive work. Three boards forming the table top were seamed by numerous splits, some very large. Several of the mortise and tenon joints in the base were loose. Wood beetles had irreparably damaged some of the secondary pine wood. Because of the deterioration, it was necessary to separate table top and base, which was done by removing wooden screws dating before 1840. When the base came off, what appeared to be penciled handwriting could be seen on the underside of the top. Barely visible with the naked eye, the writing became no more legible under ultraviolet light. The use of an infrared scope, however, distinguished a list of four soldiers' names: J.W. Ziegler, Peter Warren, John Sheads, and C.E. Armor. The notation, "Co. F 87 Pv vol." followed each man's name, with Armor's name written a second time on the underside of the top rear board. The writing seemed to have been done by one person, probably Armor, since his name appeared last on the list and was written twice.

Mike Wiltshire, an NPS staff photographer, took infrared photographs of the signatures. Then conservators attached double-faced tape to the area around the writing. A piece of mylar affixed to the tape covered the names to protect the lead pencil writing from future damage.

Establishing the identity of the four men prompted an investigation of manuscript service records at the National Archives. Pertinent sources included company muster rolls, declarations for pensions, and general affidavits on each of the men.

According to muster rolls, all four men enlisted in Company F, 87th Pennsylvania Infantry, on September 2, 1861, at Gettysburg, Pennsylvania. Charles Armor's signature appears on a declaration for an invalid pension

CURATORIAL DEV.cont.

ments regarding acquisitions. Out of this situation, Carl Russell developed himself into a leading student of fur trade material culture. He became a strong advocate for using objects in historical research, though historians generally turned a deaf ear. Ronald F. Lee, then NPS Chief Historian, however, did support the curatorial needs of park collections.

Historical resources became a critical concern in the 1930's. The Service found itself responsible for a long list of historic sites, without the professionals to study and interpret them. Few qualified curators of historical collections existed anywhere in the country. To identify and catalog artifacts, the parks relied on personal antique collectors. Care of historical collections rested on equally shaky ground, since the scientific study of specimen conservation had barely begun. Archeological collections in park custody fared somewhat better, however. By training, archeologists considered artifacts as vital resources requiring study and care. Nevertheless, the sheer volume of excavated material undermined their efforts to provide full curatorial services.

Establishment of a central Museum Division in 1935 focused these problems. The division, largely funded under various emergency relief programs, concentrated on planning and preparing exhibits for new park museums. Nevertheless, it shouldered as much responsibility for collection care as it could. In the East, it collaborated with parks having urgent curatorial needs. It supported antiquarian-curators at Morristown National Historical Park, Fort McHenry, and Colonial, and lent a novice curator to George Washington Birthplace. It diverted exhibit preparators to clean or treat historic objects. A surplus of relief workers enabled the western laboratories to provide curatorial equipment, supplies, and a few services to parks at no cost except for shipping. One of the best examples of good specimen care and study in the 1930's developed at Colonial where the interest of park management and support from the Museum Division backed up the pioneering work of Jean (Pinky) Harrington in the new field of historic archeology.

In 1940, Morristown established a permanent Civil Service position for a park museum curator. The same year, NPS acquisition of the Vanderbilt Mansion (with all its furnishings) gave visible prominence to the curatorial task. The Vanderbilt situation reinforced Ned Burns' belief that as chief of the Museum Division, he had the knowledge and experience to appreciate the problems without the ability to do more than offer advice under wartime constraints. In a more positive vein, the chief historian obtained the temporary services of a valuable collaborator, Dr. Hans Huth, a German refugee and curator of the Potsdam Palace. His expert knowledge of cultural objects emphasized the level of curatorial scholarship toward which the Service should aspire.

When a museum laboratory could be reopened late in 1946, Ned Burns took action on the Vanderbiilt Mansion situation. As the best practical solution available, he decided to

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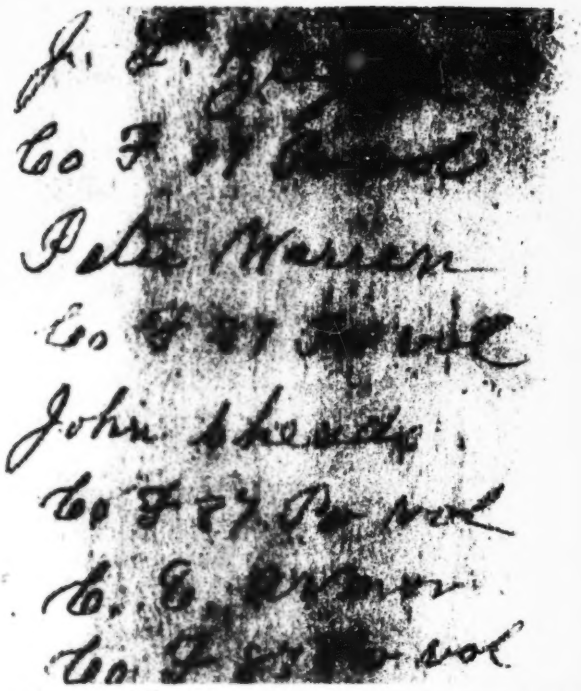
The Mystery of General Meade's Table

Ronald Sheetz



List of four soldiers' names seen on infrared film.

for himself. He also signed claims for each of the other men listed on the table. Armor's signature on a claim for Peter Warren is virtually identical to Armor's signature on the table.

To establish the authenticity of the signature, infrared photos and copies of affidavits from the National Archives were sent to the Federal Bureau of Investigation. Their examination showed that the writing for each of the signatures under the table top belonged to Charles E. Armor.

Research placed the 87th Pennsylvania Infantry under the Army of the Potomac commanded by Meade at Gettysburg. However, research also tells us that Armor's regiment did not participate in the battle and, in fact, was stationed outside Harpers Ferry at the time. The ownership record plus these bits and pieces of information add credibility to the historic associations of the Leister table at the same time that they create other questions. Did Armor write the list under the table, and if he did, when did he do it and why? Who knows? Maybe he and his buddies wanted to be recorded in history. If so, they have succeeded! **CRM**

The author is a Museum Specialist (Furniture Conservator) in the Division of Conservation, Harpers Ferry Center.

provide continuous onsite care for the furnishings. He selected a versatile and reliable preparator from the laboratory's small staff. Although not trained specifically as either a curator or a conservator, Albert McClure performed yeoman service in both capacities for many years.

A few months later, the laboratory found a young curator who combined the qualifications it had long sought. Harold L. Peterson held a graduate degree in American history from a leading university and was also a recognized expert in material culture research. The chief historian soon commandeered Peterson's services. Peterson did not return to fulltime work as a curator until his final assignment; but throughout his career, he raised the curatorial awareness of his colleagues and the credibility of the Service as a trustworthy custodian of historic objects.

During the 1950's, the Museum Branch (postwar successor to the Museum Division) made slow but significant progress in curatorial matters by: 1) establishing a small staff of scientifically trained conservators, a new and much needed breed of museum worker; 2) standardizing collection storage equipment for Servicewide use and facilitating its procurement; 3) setting up a museum record system to be used in all the parks; 4) directing a three-year crash program to upgrade these records; and 5) employing regional curators who demonstrated their value so well that these positions have continued to grow in importance. The Museum Branch largely failed, however, in its efforts to have adequate study collection rooms included in the many new visitor centers under construction. These activities continued into the 1960's. A reorganization in 1965 largely separated curatorial responsibilities from exhibit development. This permitted the new Branch of Museum Operations to concentrate most of its attention on collection care.

The 1970's saw Museum Operations grow into a Division of Museum Services. Under Art Allen's vigorous leadership, it expanded the conservation staff and provided the conservators for the first time with well-equipped laboratories. It strengthened and extended curatorial services to the field, set up the National Catalog, effectively stimulated growth of curatorial positions in the parks, and helped to fill many of them with trained curators.

Today, centralized curatorial services are managed out of the Washington office. Under the direction of Chief Curator Ann Hitchcock, a museum advocate's presence has been reestablished on the Director's staff, a presence which hopefully will maintain a continuing awareness in Washington of the pressing and specialized curatorial needs of the National Park Service.

1. Department of Interior Annual Report for Fiscal Year ending June 30, 1904. In Miscellaneous Reports, Part 1, Government Printing Office, 1904, 387.

2. Proceedings of First Park Naturalists' Training Conference, Education Headquarters, Berkeley, CA. November 1-30, 1929, 46-92. **CRM**

The author is the former Chief of the Division of Museum Operations, Harpers Ferry Center.

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News Notes

Halon 1301 Experiment

Gloria J. Fenner in the Curator (June 1982, vol. 25, no. 2) discusses NPS Western Archeological and Conservation Center experiences with the Halon 1301 fire suppressant system. The article details the Tucson office's experiment to determine the effects of escaping halon gas on irreplaceable Indian baskets stored on open shelving. Numbered boxes of various sizes (in lieu of the artifacts themselves) were placed on shelves and their positions recorded before and after the test gas release. Several boxes were blown off the shelves or moved by the gas release. As a result, care is now taken to position artifacts at a safe distance from the gas source.

AASLH Announces New Program Tapes

The American Association for State and Local History (AASLH) has announced several additions to its popular series of tape/slide programs. One of these new programs, "Fire Security in the Historic House," recommends fire detection and suppression systems, and stresses the importance of staff training. A number of the program slides feature systems and situations in furnished historic house museums in the national parks. Another new program, "The Victorian House: Identification and Conservation," highlights architectural styles, useful resource materials, and potential solutions for common problems in Victorian house conservation.

The programs sell for $34.50 each, or may be rented for $12.50 per week. Information on the 21 programs now available should be addressed to Patricia A. Hall, Assistant Director, Education Division, American Association for State and Local History, 708 Berry Road, Nashville, Tennessee 37204. The telephone number is (615) 383-5991.

AASLH also has 24 programs in its Museum Series. These cover such subjects as object registration, matting and framing prints, exhibit techniques, reproducing historic costumes, publications design, and slide show production. The programs sell for $75.00, and rent for $12.50 per week.

Brochures describing all programs in both series are available from AASLH.

Inventory At Ellis Island

This past summer, five graduate students from the New York University Museum Studies program inventoried the furnishings and artifacts of the principal structures on Ellis Island. Funding for the project came from the regional Cultural Cyclic Maintenance funds. In accordance with the contract awarded to New York University, the project team located, tagged, identified, and accounted for all movable artifacts on Ellis Island. In addition, they identified objects of possible historical significance like: tableware from the turn-of-the-century immigration period, early dental equipment, clothing, trucks, and government documents. The final inventory report has been submitted to the park superintendent and to the North Atlantic Regional Office.

Natural History Curatorial Activities

The Park Service has two current projects which specifically address natural history curation. The first is a Southeast Region trainning course scheduled for March 14-19, 1983, at Everglades National Park. Curators throughout the region will learn methods of collections curation as well as how to salvage some of the region's rapidly deteriorating natural history collections.

The second project is the development of new specimen labels for biological, geological, and paleontological collections by the Natural Sciences Division, WASO. The labels will insure that necessary data is consistently recorded for each specimen in the collection. They are available from the Curatorial Services Division, WASO.

Nitrate Negatives

Several major projects to copy nitrate negatives onto safety film have been taking place in widely separated NPS areas. Frederick Law Olmsted NHS, Western Archeological and Conservation Center, Yosemite NP, Golden Gate NRA, Grand Canyon NP, Crater Lake NP, Mount Rainier NP, George Washington Birthplace NM, Colonial NHP, Petersburg NB, and Fredericksburg and Spotsylvania NMP are among those converting photographic holdings from highly flammable nitrate-based film to more stable acetate films. The nitrate-based negatives have been found in park museum collections, libraries, maintenance files, administrative files, and practically any other imaginable place. Project reports, procedural manuals, and other documents produced in the course of these preservation projects are requested to be sent to Thomas G. Vaughan, (Staff Curator, Curatorial Services Division, Harpers Ferry Center, National Park Service, Harpers Ferry, West Virginia 25425), to aid in developing a Servicewide strategy for dealing with this serious preservation problem. Please also notify Tom of any nitrate conversion projects beyond those listed.

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